

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH "LITTLEFOOT", THE *JUNJUDEE*

Many Australian Aboriginal clans have long believed in the existence of small hairy hominids, and since the colonial era many non-indigenous people have also reported them as far north as Cape York, as far south as Gippsland in Victoria and in remote outback regions.

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Terrified teens tell of "little hairy men"

For a couple of weeks in early 1979, the citizens of Charters Towers were in an uproar over reports of "little hairy ape-men" supposedly attacking teenagers on a hill overlooking the old north Queensland mining town. The encounters had apparently been occurring since about August or September 1978, but it wasn't until six months later that the story hit the headlines in the local and national news.¹ It had all the makings of a good schlock-horror film.

One night in late February, the sedate routine at Charters Towers Police Station was shattered when a breathless young man burst through the door to report that one of his mates had gone missing in strange circumstances on Towers Hill, a popular lovers' rendezvous on the outskirts of town. According to police, 19-year-old apprentice baker Michael Mangan was ashen-faced as he poured out the story. Earlier that night, as on other occasions, he had persuaded a group of friends to join him in searching the rugged hillside for mysterious "little hairy men", but somehow one of the boys had become lost. They could clearly hear his terrified screams but, try as they might, could not locate him in the inky darkness.

As the whole area was riddled with dangerous old mine shafts, the police responded immediately and within minutes were at the base of the hill. No sooner had they begun the ascent, however, than they met the missing youth running frantically down the road in the opposite direction. Safely back at the station, the badly shaken lad told of being attacked by one of the hairy little men. He said he had fought it off with a rock. During the interview, the officer in charge, Sergeant Gill Engler, noticed blood on the uninjured boy's leg and it was evidently not his own.

When the gob-smacked coppers quizzed Michael Mangan again, he supported his mate's story, saying the incident was the culmination of many sightings and searches for the little ape-men. It had all started one night about six months earlier, when he was parked on the hill with his girlfriend: "I looked across to the passenger side and saw a black, hairy face at the window. It was awful. The face was small and drawn back like that of an ape. We both screamed because we got such a shock. I started the car to get out of the place and this thing raised his hand and smashed the passenger side window." The creature was about one metre tall and covered in black hair.

When the Charters Towers story first came our way, we didn't quite know what to make of it. By the late 1970s we had collected quite a few other reports of hairy ape-men in Australia, but those creatures commonly known as yowies were apparently rather Sasquatch-like and had an average height, based upon eyewitness estimates, of well over seven feet. If the three-foot-tall Towers Hill creatures were yowies, they must surely have been extremely young ones—mere ankle-biters. If that was the case, how was it that throughout their months of searching, during which they'd seen several little ones, Michael and his friends had never encountered a mama or papa yowie?

"Littlefoot" in Aboriginal lore

The "Littlefoot" story seemed to be a one-off, and initially we filed it in the "too hard" basket. It wasn't long before we had to retrieve it, however, because soon afterwards we began to hear bits and pieces of Aboriginal lore that seemed to refer to a widespread belief in the existence of similar little hairy men in other parts of Australia.

The little creatures were known by many names, including *dinderi*, *kuritjah*, *magulid*, *net-net*, *nimminge*, *nimbunj*, *njmbin*, *waaki*, *wadagadarn*, *waligada*, *waladhegahra*, *winambuu* and several variations on the word *junjudee*.

Some northern New South Wales Aborigines commonly referred to the little creatures as *brown jacks*.

According to a 1977 edition of the *Richmond River Historical Society Bulletin*, the hippie Mecca of Nimbin, NSW, was named after the small hairy creatures that Aborigines said lived in the area. They were described as being "sort of hobbits". When he was a child, Bundjalung elder Gerry Bostock was told that the name of a neighbouring town, Mullumbimby, also means "little hairy man".² Monkeys, of course, have supposedly never existed in Australia; they got no closer than the Indonesian island of Bali, about 1,200 kilometres (750 miles) away to the northwest. The nearest great apes, orang-utans, are in Sumatra, even further away.

Although it was some years before we interviewed people who claimed personal encounters with junjudees, we soon met Aborigines who told of sightings by relatives or friends. Disconcertingly, however, our informants didn't appear to be speaking of an entirely uncouth race of wild little monkey-men. They sometimes attributed to them strange behaviours and semi-magical qualities that are reminiscent of the fairy lore of Britain and other places.

The Ualarai people of central northern NSW, for instance, believe that the *winembu* will sometimes persuade a human being to follow them home. The person's spirit is then somehow stolen, but, when the victim returns to human society, he or she finds it impossible to describe the ordeal.

Among the clans of the lower Clarence Valley in northern NSW, the little hairy men are known as *nimminge*. In 1991 a Bundjalung elder, Ron Heron, recalled a story that has echoes of the European fairy tale "Three Billy-Goats Gruff":

"[When] I was 16 or 17, Frank Randall, a friend of my father, told me of a little hairy man living at

Ashby. Some nights, when Frank was walking home from the ferry...he would come to a small wooden bridge where there would be a little hairy man waiting for him. Frank would have to wrestle with this man before he could go across the bridge. He said this would happen as many as 10 times each year. Since then...I have heard similar stories from other older people."³

Well, this was very confusing, not to mention inconvenient. We were just beginning to assemble enough data to make a reasonable case for the existence of the big hairy yowies, but now we had to deal with distracting tales of hairy little people—and magical hairy little people at that! For some time we tried to accommodate the Aboriginal reports, which at that stage were all second or third hand, by filing them as native folklore. The Charters Towers reports we consigned again to the limbo of the "too hard" basket.

That was the way things stood in the early 1990s when we were working on our first book, *Out of the Shadows: Mystery Animals of Australia*. As a result, although we wrote a lengthy chapter about the "Bigfoot"-like yowie, we dismissed the matter of the tiny junjudee in just a few paragraphs. Since then, however, we have collected a lot more Aboriginal junjudee lore as well as eyewitness reports from both Aborigines and non-Aborigines. We would like to be able to say that, armed with this new information, we now know exactly what the little hairy men are and exactly how they relate to the yowie phenomenon. Frankly though, we are almost as baffled by the junjudees today as we were when we first heard of them 27 years ago.

Over the years we have, of course, toyed with various theories, but the pesky little creatures, like the elves and fairies of Europe, have always managed to avoid being pinned down. At times, like many of our colleagues, we have favoured what seems to be the most logical explanation: that the junjudees are simply juvenile yowies. That assumption, however, flies in the face of the apparently unanimous belief among knowledgeable Aborigines that such is not the case.

The magical aspects of junjudee lore have made us, at times, strongly inclined to dismiss the whole phenomenon as native myth. Whenever we drifted too far in that direction, however, we were dragged back to "reality" by eyewitness reports by both Aboriginal and white Australians, who, like Michael Mangan, seemed to be describing encounters with very solid, very real little creatures. Perhaps, at this point, it would be best for us to present various representative items from our junjudee file, so that readers can attempt to make up their own minds.

"A handsome little fellow"

In 1977, 86-year-old Henry Methven told Patricia Riggs of the *Macleay Argus*⁴ about a little creature he'd seen while hunting near Jervis Bay, southern New South Wales, in about 1901. Having become separated from his companions, the then 10-year-old Henry returned alone to a temporary camp.

"I was stripping off my shirt and when I looked around, the Hairy Man was standing right behind me. He was only about...two or three foot...a handsome little fellow ... he had a long straight nose and he was the colour of a real full-blood...dark and coppery ... everything about the little bloke...seemed to be human."

The creature was strongly built with a short neck. There was hair on the

back of its hands. On its head, the hair was about two or three inches long and "a bit smoky-looking, a bit grey". Its body hair was different, "darkish brown". That was as much detail as the startled boy could absorb. "I took off into the bush and got stung with stinging nettles," he said. "The next day we tracked him. He had feet like a human's...five toes."

On a nearby ridge, they found evidence that the little creature lived with others in a small cave and dined on shellfish. Henry said all the tribal elders knew about the creatures. They called them *wallathegah*. The creatures were said to be harmless and to have a great fondness for honey. Earlier that day, Henry's party had harvested honey from a native beehive and Henry had carried it back to camp. The elders said, "He could smell the honey and he followed you along."

A light-fingered Lilliputian

Folklorist Aldo Massola, author of *Bunjil's Cave*,⁵ heard similar stories of little hairy men, known locally as *net-nets*, from Aborigines at Lake Condah, Victoria, in the 1950s and early 1960s. As well as being hairy and very small, net-nets were said to have claws instead of fingernails and toenails. They were mischievous but harmless, and were believed to live in natural hollows among jumbled heaps of boulders. Andrew Arden told of encountering one in about 1932, while hunting with his wife in the Stony Rises near the lake. He had just shot a rabbit when "one of the little people" suddenly appeared, seized the carcass and ran

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away over the rocks. Mr Arden gave chase but soon lost sight of the light-fingered Lilliputian.

Remarkable as they most certainly are, Mr Methven's and Mr Arden's stories seem straightforward reports of encounters with some sort of apparently real, if extremely rare, animal or hominid. However, many—if not most—junjudee stories are (to the "Western" mind, at least) not quite so down to Earth.

Hairy creatures with occult knowledge

Frank Povah, a researcher, lecturer and writer of mixed Aboriginal and European ancestry, collected many stories about the little hairy men and included them in his fascinating book *You Kids, Count Your Shadows*.⁶ Most of the tales were told by Wiradjuri people, whose country covers about 87,000 square kilometres of central New South Wales. Several of the stories contain rather magical details, but while Frank sees the little hairy men as "indigenous fairies ... [the] Aboriginal equivalent...of white Australian folklore", he is open to the possibility that they also have some kind of objective reality. His informants provided fairly uniform descriptions of the little beings, which they knew by various names, commonly *yuurii*:

"A little man about so high—a metre, say. Small, real small... Covered in hair with long nails and big teeth... *Yuuriwinaa* means hairy woman...about three feet [in height], a bit more. Real hairy...teeth like a greyhound, big fangs..."

A minority of informants said that males sometimes sported long beards, but foul body odour was often mentioned: "real stinkin'", "real smelly". They lived in mountain caves, in holes in the ground and in the gidji scrub. Like Henry Methven, the Wiradjuri said the little men had feet that were quite human-like; but whereas he had seen five-toed tracks, they insisted the creatures had only four. Testimony about the creatures' behaviour also contained minor anomalies. They were said to be quite harmless, but, paradoxically, most people seemed to be afraid of them. Some parents used tales of the little men to scare children away from dangerous locations, but others "always used to say to the kids, 'Don't be frightened of them'".

One remarkable attribute seemed to place the little creatures firmly in the realm of fairy lore: *they could speak*, although they would normally converse only with old, initiated, "clever men" in "the lingo" (the Wiradjuri language). At least some Wiradjuri believed the "little fellers" possessed considerable occult knowledge, "same as the high initiated people". Aborigines in some other parts of the country have similar beliefs.

In 2002, an Aboriginal elder from the NSW south coast told naturalist Gary Opit of tribal lore that emphasised the junjudees' supernatural nature and also their connection with children. He said that an ancient initiation ceremony involved children smearing their bodies with blood and ochre and then bathing in waterholes near Mumbulla Mountain. His people believed the little hairy men were then spontaneously created out of the blood and ochre as it flowed down the Murrumbidgee River. The elder had seen the little creatures himself.

A magical spirit

Henry Buchanan, a Kumbaingeri man of Nambucca Heads, NSW, said the junjudee has a material form—at least sometimes—but is also a kind of magical elf/benevolent spirit. In 1976 he told *Macleay Argus* correspondent Sue Horton:⁷ "The hairy man is just a little mite, like a little monk [monkey]. If you catch them, they are as good as the Lord. They do things for you." He claimed that they emerged from holes at Middle Head and that he had seen one there, but had been unable to cry out. "I couldn't make a sound," he said. On being asked about the feasibility of trapping one, Mr Buchanan said: "You can't catch him. No... He's a spirit, but he's a live thing, too. As soon as you catch him, he goes into your blood and his spirit goes into you. He's with you all the time. Any people get sick...like might be dying, they...send for you...and you say, 'Listen, I want you to go to this place' and this [little] fellow knows where to go. He...fixes it up. They call him 'the little brown jack'."

After such a mind-bogglingly strange but apparently sincerely told story, it would not be surprising if many readers now feel that the junjudee phenomenon should be written off as a colourful, widespread, Aboriginal myth. But if it is only a myth, how do we account for the numerous sightings by non-Aborigines?

"It took off in a hell of a hurry..."

In mid-1997, while driving along the Mount Lindsay Highway in northern NSW, Mark Pope of Bexhill, NSW, encountered what may well have been a junjudee:⁸

"It was just on daybreak; I still had the headlights on. I was heading down to Tooloom, heading south. There's a State Forest there; it has massive white gums in it... I came around a corner...there was a combination of my headlights and enough [natural] light to see—just. There

was something on the other side of the road...this thing looked like it had just crossed the road before I'd got there. It was about to go into bushes on the other side, which was up a slight embankment. And it looked for all the world like it had heard me, stopped, looked over its shoulder, and was looking to see what I was doing.

"If I had to say it looked like anything, I'd say a chimpanzee. As to whether it was a chimp, I'd say no, but something in the same line; I can't quite say what... As much as I could tell, it was covered in hair. It was quite dark; dark brown or black. Its face...I can't remember it very clearly, except that it seemed fairly flat. It wasn't very big: about the height of a guidepost [about three feet or one metre]... When it decided to move, it took off in a hell of a hurry and used arms, legs and everything to claw its way up the bank—and then it was gone."

In early October 1979, as they were driving west on the Wide Bay Highway just before dusk, Mr and Mrs Roy Locke of Theodore, Queensland, saw a one-metre-tall hairy animal standing beside the road about 20 kilometres northeast of Murgon. Mrs Locke told the *South Burnett Times* that the creature had broad shoulders and stood looking at them as they drove past. The Cherbourg Aboriginal Reserve is only six kilometres south of Murgon. When told of the Lockes' experience, Les Stewart, chairman of Cherbourg's Aboriginal Council, said: "There is a

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small man called *junjurrie* who was seen here as recently as eight years ago. He was about a metre tall and used to play with the children in the old hospital. Several adults claimed to have seen him when they heard the children laughing at night.⁹

Guardians and spiritual secrets

In February 2000, after small, furry, bipedal animals were seen beside the Burnett River at Gayndah, 120 kilometres west of Hervey Bay, Queensland, a local Aboriginal man, Sam Hill, told journalists that the creatures were not feral bears, as assumed by non-Aboriginal witnesses, but the *jongari*.¹⁰ The little creatures, he said, had lived beside his people, the Waka Waka, from as far back as anyone could remember. In recent times, however, most of them had moved away because of drastic changes to their environment brought about by European settlement: "...when they blew up the mountain near here to build the railway...a lot of them ran out of the hills". The normally inoffensive little creatures could react violently to destruction of the natural environment. Sam said his grandfather had been attacked by one while ringbarking trees.

When we met Sam's father Rodney Hill a few weeks later, he made it clear that he disapproved of his son talking to the media.¹¹ His people, he explained, normally never mention the little hairy men to outsiders; their secret lore was one of the few things the Waka Waka had left. However, when he realised we were genuinely interested in the phenomenon and had travelled far to learn about it, he did share a few details, while emphasising that a great deal more must always remain secret.

The word *jongari* is not quite correct, he said. His people's term for the little people would be more correctly rendered as *jungurri*, although *junjudee* is an acceptable variation. The *jungurri* had always been guardians of his people and kept a particularly close protective eye on sick children. If, however, they are ridiculed or even talked about too loosely, they are liable to punish the talkative person or family members with illness. Then, only traditional rites—not Western medicine—can cure the afflicted. But now, he lamented, all the Waka Waka "clever men" had gone: the last of them had passed away with his father's generation. That was partly why the situation at Gayndah—with stories about the little people being bandied about, sometimes jocularly, in the media—worried him so much. If, as a result, sickness was visited on his people, there was no one left to cure them. The whole episode saddened him.

Researchers who believe the little creatures are flesh-and-blood animals explain away the supernatural aspects of Aboriginal *junjudee* lore. They point out that Aborigines don't ascribe such qualities only to the *junjudee* but see supernatural or spiritual qualities in every other animal in Australia—and in all the plants, streams, landforms and other aspects of creation. Furthermore, it is only natural that tribal people would attribute some magical powers to an animal as damnably elusive as the *junjudee*. Although we, too, would like to see it proved that the creatures are real, we think it foolish and disrespectful to ignore Aboriginal lore that is apparently centuries if not millennia old.

Tracks and attacks

While at present there may be up to two dozen fairly active *yowie* investigators in Australia, we know of only one person, Grahame Walsh, who has concentrated exclusively on the mystery of the tiny *junjudee* for any length of time. Dr Walsh, a former National Parks and Wildlife officer, a writer and a photographer, is one of Australia's greatest authorities on Aboriginal rock art. Carnarvon National Park, where he conducted most of his investigations, is situated about 350 kilometres northwest of Gayndah. It is famous not only for its rugged beauty, but also for its abundance of ancient Aboriginal rock art—the kind of art that Dr Walsh has presented so magnificently in his various books.

During his years at Carnarvon, Walsh heard many references to *junjudees* and at least saw apparent *junjudee* tracks, similar to those of a five-year-old child. He interviewed several eyewitnesses, all of whom described the creatures as being hair-covered, ape-like and about one metre tall. Most also mentioned the creatures' terrible smell. There were seasoned bushmen, he said, who would not camp in certain areas for fear of the little creatures. "There were a lot of reports [up to about the mid-1970s], but people don't get out on their properties [on horseback] the way they used to. Nowadays people go in a vehicle."¹²

One witness, timber man Graham Griggs, was kept awake by *junjudees* that leapt around on the edge of his campsite and repeatedly jumped between his tent and the fire, leaving many tracks and scaring him so much that he abandoned the site altogether. Another timber-getter, Leo Denton of Injune, found tiny tracks and heard cries "like chooks cackling". His wife Joy also saw fresh tracks "like a kid's bare feet" in remote bush locations.

Interestingly enough, another local person compared *junjudee* vocalisations to those of birds. Retired timber man Paddy O'Connor told journalist John Pinkney that he once encountered two of the little creatures while camped in the vicinity of Carnarvon Gorge. They gave off an

absolutely nauseating odour and were, he said, "pointing at my billycan. [They] seemed to be exchanging comments about it. I wasn't in much doubt they were using some type of language. It was a kind of chirping, but seemed to have a shape to it." Although it was just on dawn, and there wasn't enough light for him to discern the colour of their fur, Mr O'Connor noticed that the creatures' eyes, like those of *yowies*, seemed to shine: "their reddish eyes were very visible".¹³

Whatever *junjudees* may be, they are certainly widely distributed. Les Holland, of Tully in tropical far north Queensland, has collected some interesting eyewitness reports.¹⁴ Nathan Moilan, whose parents are Aboriginal and Indian, told Mr Holland that his father, a timber worker, often spoke of seeing little hairy men in the Kirrama Range behind Tully. The sightings supposedly occurred between 1990 and 1991, just before rainforest logging was halted in the area. Nathan's father said that one night, when he and his uncle were sharing a three-room hut in the mountains, a little hairy man attacked his uncle as he lay on his bed. Hearing desperate cries for help, Nathan's father rushed in and together he and his uncle wrestled with the very powerful little creature. Just

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as they began to overpower it, it broke free, jumped out the window and fled into the night.

Mr Moilan isn't the only person to report an attack by a hairy little man. We have in our files a similar story from much further south.¹⁵ In September 1968, while working at Kookaburra, an isolated saw-milling settlement on the Carrai Plateau, about 50 kilometres west of Kempsey, NSW, George Gray slept in a small hut surrounded by dense scrub. One dark night, between midnight and 1.00 am, he was woken by the sensation of something pressing down on his chest and realised he was being attacked by a hairy creature. He said that although it was only about four feet (1.2 metres) tall, it was broad and powerful, and apparently was intent on dragging him outside. It had hair "like a Phyllis Diller wig", a hairless copper-coloured face, a big flat nose and round human-like eyes.

"The thing was looking straight into my face. The funny thing was, it didn't seem to be angry. The hair was a dirty grey colour [but] seemed to be clean. There was no smell. No smell at all. That's a funny thing."

There were other very odd details. The creature's big "stubby" hands were seemingly five-fingered, but its arms, though thick, seemed very short. Even stranger, "the skin...was sort of loose...like it had no muscles...like trying to hold something slippery. I could feel the bones. I couldn't feel the flesh at all." It didn't make a sound, "didn't seem to be breathing".

But it could still shake him like a dog. As they wrestled on the floor, Mr Gray could see, in the bright moonlight, that the hairy horror seemed to have webbed toes. After 10 desperate minutes, it abruptly ran out the door. His two young sons, in a nearby room, had heard the commotion but were too frightened to investigate.

Where did they come from?

The most important question about junjudees is this: are they merely juvenile yowies or are they an entirely different species? Our colleague Gary Opit points out that none of the presumed junjudees seen by either Aborigines or non-Aborigines has been accompanied by full-sized yowie "parents". This, to Gary, strongly suggests the little creatures are a separate species.

Despite the Aboriginal lore and the sighting reports from non-Aborigines, there isn't a skerrick of physical evidence to indicate ape-like creatures, large or small, ever existed on the Australian continent. In 2004, however, relatively recent (only 18,000 years old) remains of "junjudee-like" creatures, *Homo floresiensis*, were discovered on the Indonesian island of Flores.¹⁶

It is now generally believed that the much larger *Homo erectus*, whose remains have been found throughout Southeast Asia, also reached Flores about 840,000 years ago and survived there for several millennia. *H. erectus* was powerfully built, bipedal, had protruding brow ridges and possibly was quite hairy. Some researchers think it possible that some of the creatures continued southward to Australia, where they evolved into today's hulking yowies. Flores is 700 kilometres (435 miles) from Australia, but during the ice ages when sea levels were considerably lower, island-hopping would have been less difficult.

There is one very appealing thing about the *Homo erectus* = yowie theory: it could account for both the yowie and the junjudee legends. Mike Morwood and Peter Brown, the scientists who discovered the tiny *Homo floresiensis* skeletons on Flores, believe that those little people were descended from *Homo erectus*, which, over the course of its 840,000 years on the small island, slowly shrank in size. (Flores was also home to elephants, which, over a similar period of time, shrank to the size of cows.)

Some of the characteristics of the *H. floresiensis* skeletons are interesting, in light of their possible connection to the yowie and junjudee mystery: they had extraordinarily long arms, reaching almost to their knees; their faces projected forward and, although their skulls were very small, their teeth were large and prominent.

One of the most exciting things about the "hobbits", as their discoverers dubbed them, is that the present inhabitants of Flores say the little creatures survived there until about 300 years ago. According to tribal tradition, the creatures, known locally as *ebu gogo*, had big eyes, flat foreheads and *hair all over their bodies*.

Even during the ice ages, island-hopping from mainland Asia to Flores would have involved sea crossings for *H. erectus* of up to 24 kilometres. Morwood and Brown think *H. erectus* may have been capable of building rafts, but such technology might not have been necessary. Each crossing could have happened by accident.

After the tsunami disaster of December 2004, several groups of Indonesians were swept tens of kilometres out to sea. To island-hop from Flores to Australia during the last ice age, *H. erectus* would have needed to make a crossing of 60 kilometres. That seems like a rather long jump—until we consider what happened to Rizal Shaputra, who drifted 160 kilometres on a tangle of tree branches after the recent tsunami. He told his rescuers that for the first few days of his ordeal, there were "many" other people with him.



An artist's impression of *Homo floresiensis*. The creatures may actually have been covered head to foot in hair. (Illustration courtesy of Mike Morwood)

During the last 840,000 years, hundreds of similar tsunamis must have occurred as well as tens of thousands of cyclones and other cataclysmic weather events. It is therefore tempting to speculate that while some *Homo erectus* stayed on Flores, others blundered southward to Australia. While their stay-at-home cousins shrank on tiny Flores, they, finding themselves on a gigantic island continent teeming with lumbering megafauna, may have greatly increased in size (as another relation, *Homo heidelbergensis*, did on the Asian mainland⁷). Hundreds of thousands of years later, some *Homo floresiensis* may have followed them.

On their own arrival in Australia about 60,000 years ago, the ancestors of modern Aborigines would therefore have encountered both types of hairy man: the "big fellas" that they came to know by many names including yowie and dulagarl, and the "little fellas" that they knew as junjudee, njmbin, etc. At first, all three species may have coexisted quite happily.

Over several millennia, however, the Aborigines colonised every part of Australia. The introduction of dingoes 3,000 to 4,000 years ago and the use of the dogs in hunting may have given Aborigines a great advantage over *H. erectus* and *H. floresiensis*. Conflict would have been inevitable.

After centuries of skirmishing with their technologically superior neighbours, the hairy men, greatly reduced in numbers, may have retreated to the places where it is easiest to hide: the deep forests and rugged mountains.

One problem with the notion that yowies and junjudees are descended from *Homo erectus* is this: both *H. erectus* and *H. floresiensis* used stone tools and apparently fire. Could both the "big fellas" and the "little fellas" have lost or abandoned all their technology upon arrival in Australia? Such a scenario isn't entirely implausible. In both cases the original immigrants are likely to have arrived clinging to storm-driven debris. Perhaps only isolated couples or very small groups—maybe even groups consisting only of children—were swept ashore. A lot can happen in 500,000 years or so.

The Tasmanian Aborigines, isolated for 12,000 years since the last ice age and numbering fewer than 8,000, also lost almost all of their technology. In *The Future Eaters*,¹⁸ Dr Tim Flannery mentions that the Tasmanians had forgotten how to make fire, according to reports of the first Europeans to encounter them. If a group's fire became extinguished, its members had no option but to eat raw meat until they managed to locate another whose fire sticks were still burning. Subsequent excavations of Tasmanian campsites revealed other strange things: while bone tools including awls and needles were in common use 7,000 years ago, their use slowly dwindled until, 3,500 years later, they had ceased to be used at all. The knowledge of how to make hafted axes, boomerangs and spear-throwers was also lost.

But while it is entertaining to speculate about the relationship of *H. erectus* to *H. floresiensis*, their possible travels eastward and southward from Flores and their possible relationship to both the yowie and the junjudee, the fact remains that not a single bone or tooth of either creature has yet been found anywhere in Australia. So the question remains unanswered as to whether the junjudee is related to the yowie or whether it exists at all.

Maybe one day we'll discover the truth about our little hairy friends—and maybe we never will. All we can do for the moment is keep our cameras handy while in areas noted for sightings, and keep our junjudee file—and our minds—open.

Endnotes

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13. John Pinkney, *Great Australian Mysteries*, The Five Mile Press, Victoria, 2003, p. 32.
14. Correspondence from Les Holland to Gary Opit, 11 August 1999.
15. *Macleay Argus*, 4 and 18 September 1976; *Sun-Herald*, Sydney, 12 September 1976.
16. *Nature*, vol. 431, pp. 1055 and 1087; *New Scientist*, 30 October 2004; Richard Freeman, "For fear of little men", *Animals & Men*, no. 35, pp. 19-20; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 December 2004, pp. 1-2; *National Geographic*, November 2005.
17. Although not quite yowie-size, one *Homo erectus* descendant, *Homo heidelbergensis*, which flourished for millennia in Europe and Asia, stood six feet tall on average and was more muscular than modern humans. *H. heidelbergensis* is sometimes referred to as "Goliath".
18. Tim Flannery, *The Future Eaters*, Reed New Holland, Sydney, 1994, pp. 264-270.

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Maybe one day we'll discover the truth about our little hairy friends—and maybe we never will.